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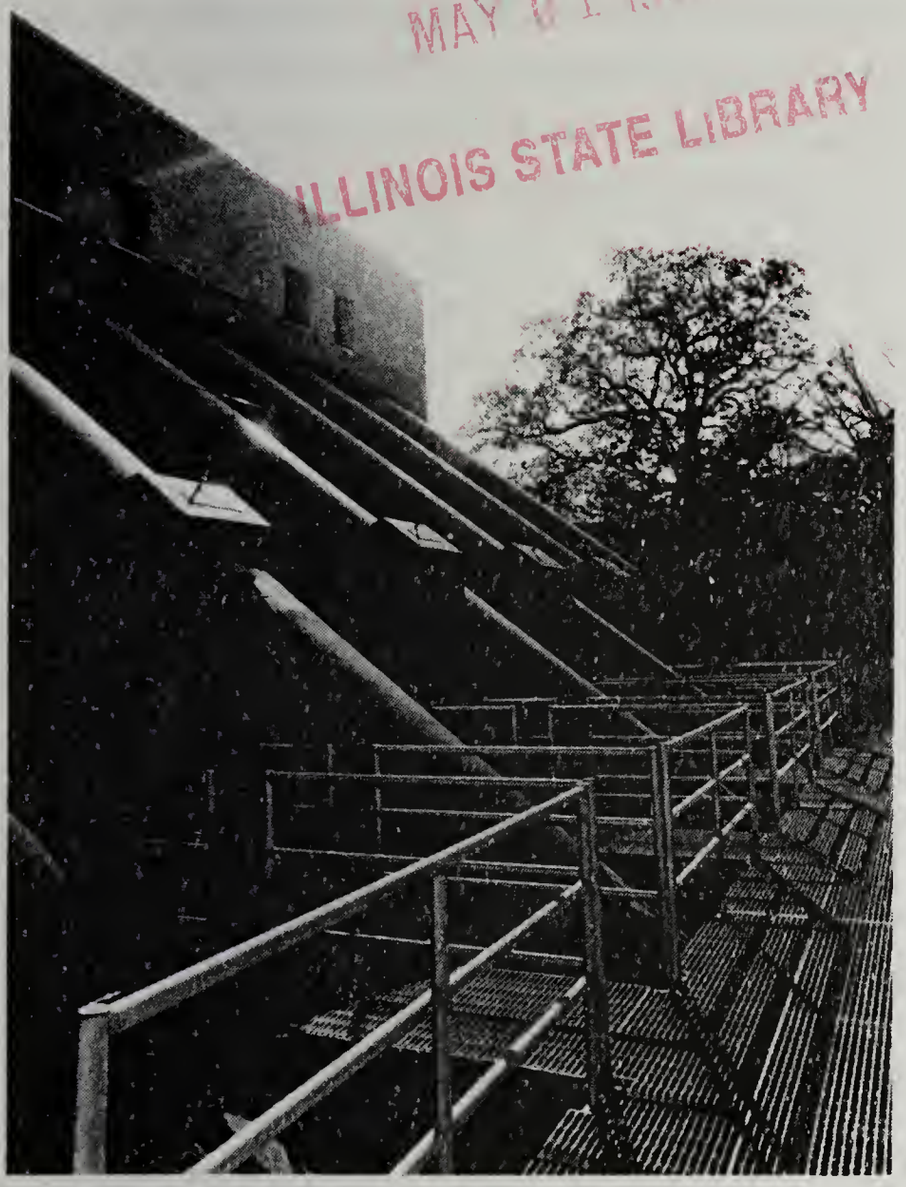

The Municipal Wastewater Assistance Program

Operating a wastewater treatment plant is a continuous job, requiring proper training and sometimes costly equipment. With support from state and local officials, facilities will find it easier to comply with water quality regulations.

Since 1984, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has operated the Municipal Wastewater Assistance program, a cooperative effort established under the federal Clean Water Act to help bring facilities into and/or maintain compliance with state and federal requirements.

Under the Municipal Wastewater Assistance Program the Illinois EPA steps out of its enforcement role to serve as facilitator to provide innovative, cost-effective methods of improving plant performance. To date, dozens of Illinois communities have utilized the program to bring, and keep, their facilities in compliance.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Many problems, or "performance limiting factors," are common to many plants. The Illinois EPA offers communities help in dealing with such areas as:

- process control procedures like sludge wasting and return rates, mixed liquor concentrations and dissolved aeration tank oxygen levels;
- sludge handling and disposal procedures, one of the most complex areas of operation;
- proper process control and NPDES data reporting. Frequently, there is a need for adequate laboratory equipment to test and interpret data in order to properly control the process and monitor the facility;
- improving operating budgets and user charge systems;

- inadequate staffing, often associated with high turnover rates linked to low pay;
- plant design problems that may involve clarifiers, aerators or disinfection;
- problems with industrial dischargers to the system;
- preventive maintenance, and
- excessive down time for equipment and process units.

BECOMING A PROGRAM PARTNER

To qualify as a candidate for the Municipal Wastewater Assistance program, a community must meet some federal eligibility requirements, in addition to having potential compliance problems. These federal requirements include:

- an ability to meet NPDES permit requirements without the need for major construction;
- design flows of five million gallons per day or less;
- the community must be a current or former recipient of a state or federal grant for a wastewater project.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Total community involvement is the key to a successful project. Therefore, the Illinois EPA feels there must be strong support from city officials to assure adequate operator time at the plant and adequate financing to pay for needed improvements. It is also important for city officials to support their operators, who must be willing to learn new operational procedures. Facilities must not have any record of operator certification violations.

Municipal facilities meeting most or all of these requirements will be eligible for screening and possible selection by Illinois EPA regional municipal assistance coordinators. Facilities with the greatest needs, or the best opportunity for success, are selected. While candidates are in the program for one federal fiscal year (Oct. 1-Sept. 30), extensions can be granted when program participants need additional time to complete the operator training program.

GETTING THE PROJECT UNDERWAY

Before the project formally begins, regional municipal assistance coordinators will meet with community officials and plant operators to ensure community commitment to the project and to correcting problems or meeting needs. As the program progresses, visits are made by Illinois EPA field staff, based on training needs or in response to particular problems.

At the conclusion of the project work year, Illinois EPA coordinators will meet with city officials and operators to review the degree of success, accomplishments, failures or unfinished business relating to the project.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

The Municipal Wastewater Assistance program will not work without total commitment from city officials. Follow up studies show that many communities have saved money while coming into compliance, or have lowered their operating costs by participation in the program. Often, the cost for coming into compliance is a mere fraction of the penalties for being in non-compliance. Implementing preventive maintenance programs and identifying energy savings are the methods most often used to reach cost-effective end results.

For more information on the program and participating communities in your area, contact the regional municipal assistance coordinator at the Illinois EPA regional office nearest you.

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4302 N. Main St.
Rockford, IL 61103
(815)987-7760

Region 2
1701 First Ave.
Maywood IL 60153
(708)338-7900

Region 3
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Peoria IL 61614
(309)693-5463

Region 4
2125 S. First St.
Champaign IL 61820
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Region 5
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Springfield IL 62706
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Collinsville IL 62234
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